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CHAPTER IX

THE NATIONAL STATE AS INTRUDER AND REFORMER

In Dragalevtsy, as in agricultural villages throughout the world, the national state was building up a loyalty in competition with the unquestioned loyalty people used to give to their family group and their community. The spread of the government-sponsored school, though its scientific teachings were elementary, weakened the hold of the formalistic, institutionalized religion which went along with a familistic society. Because of the school there was increased conflict between the older and younger generations.

Not only in time of war but also in time of peace the national government had been calling its young men to leave their plows and their cattle to take up pick or rifle. The *trudovatsi* handled the picks, and those in military training the rifles.

After the first World War Bulgaria initiated an ambitious program of compulsory labor as a substitute for military training, formerly required. The original plan called for service from both young men and young women. Recruiting of women later ceased for they proved unsuited to the system. The young men of the country were enrolled in labor camps where they performed their *trudova* (compulsory labor). Each young *trudovak* was required to serve eight months, though for two thousand leva, or less than $25, he could buy himself off at the end of six months. Some young men paid a total ranging from 9,000 leva to 32,000 leva, according to their economic status, to be entirely exempted from service.

The *trudovatsi* built many highways and bridges, and worked without pay in government shops, factories, and lumber plants. Their achievements were significant although much of this potential man power was unused or misused because of the lack of sufficient engineers to give proper direction to the work.

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The *trudova* system existed in principle until Bulgaria joined the Axis, though, she like all countries defeated in the first World War, passed through a period when compulsory labor was gradually replaced by compulsory military service. After the *coup d'état* of May, 1934, various groups of army officers controlled many of the country's policies; so it was not surprising to learn of the strengthening of the military forces of the nation. One sign of the government's changed policy was the fact that in 1935 not a single young man from Dragalevtsy went as a *trudovak*, but sixteen were called to do military service. Those eligible for service were called before a commission of army officers and examined; the successful ones passed on to receive military training, and the rest were returned home. Those who were rejected lost some standing in the eyes of the villagers, because it was thought that they had inherited some family weakness. The *family* rather than the individual was blamed.

There was undeniably a great influence exercised upon the village by the practice of taking young men, in their impressionable years, away from the village for an interval of several months. They lived in an army barracks or a *trudovak* camp with other young men from different parts of the country. For a time they ceased doing some things which the village thought essential, and they learned to do other things which older family members would perhaps have frowned upon. They went out from a family system where each member worked more or less as a part of the whole; they returned often very conscious of their own individuality, and had to pass through a process of reconditioning before the early customs, habits, and patterns of thought once more closed about them. There were some individuals who never again fell completely into line and who turned to Sofia for employment and a more congenial atmosphere.

Older men who returned to the village as retired noncommissioned officers enjoyed a certain prestige that lingered after brass buttons and clumping boots had been exchanged for the conventional village attire. On the wall of the office of the Village Clerk, the names of all local officials and public employees were posted. There was considerable information regarding each man, but the concluding and perhaps most important item was the statement of the person's service

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Flower bazaar and tavern: It is around the fourth destination on Fridays that fondest memories cling, because this is the spot near the Sofia flower bazaar where young people from surrounding villages go upon completing their morning duties in town. It is here that romance blossoms and young men from one village are introduced to girls from another. While the younger people are amusing themselves here the older people, especially the men, gather at the tavern called *Dulgata Mehana,* the particular establishment to which Dragalevtsy peasants are loyal.[1] They lunch and drink here, they rest here, and here they swap their stories. Nor is it without pride that they tell how Fiodor Chaliapin, the celebrated opera singer, in 1934 spent a very merry evening in this *Dulgata Mehana,* enjoying its drink and atmosphere. Seldom, however, does the peasant get to converse with the Sofia citizenry in this tavern. Here again he is in a peasant world; if he were not, he would feel decidedly uncomfortable. Should he decide to see a movie, in the afternoon he would go to a cheap theater on a side street and guffaw with his fellow peasants.[2]

2. To Serve His Country. The *trudova* system, or that of compulsory labor for the young men of Bulgaria, has received much attention in the West. It served a magnificent purpose, taking as it did young men from villages throughout the land, mixing them up in labor camps, and providing them with picks and shovels for the construction of highways, bridges, and other public works. But now the young Bulgarian citizen is given military training instead. This is not in keeping with the Treaty of Neuilly, which limited Bulgaria's armed forces to 33,000, but what nation in Europe, the Bulgarians ask, has been abiding by the treaties? The trend from *trudova* to military service is shown by the fact that in 1935 not a single youth was called from Dragalevtsy to do *trudova* service, but sixteen went to be trained as soldiers.

The effect of life in a labor camp or a military barracks upon the young men is apparent upon their return to the village. They have gone out from a family system where each member works unquestioningly as a part of the whole; they return, in spite of military discipline, often very conscious of their own individuality, and have to pass through a process of reconditioning before the early customs, habits, and patterns of thought again close in about them. However, before the returning young men are reabsorbed by the community, reverberations of struggle are felt throughout parts of the social structure. There are some who never again fall completely into line and who naturally

[1] Every village over a period of years has tended to select one tavern where peasants from that village spend their leisure time while in Sofia.

[2] Fifty-five per cent of the villagers (babies, children, and adults) have never seen a cinema. Out of 265 families reporting, *all* members of 73 families had seen a cinema; *no* members of 78 families had done so.

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156 turn to Sofia for employment and sympathy. But the significant fact is that
● 702 most young people do submit to the process of resocialization and as they grow older adopt the conservatism of their elders. In other words, no attempt is made in the army experience to teach them new farming methods, bee-keeping, animal breeding, or anything else which they might apply in a useful way upon their return to the village.

554 3. For the Good of His Soul. When asked "Why do you go on pil-
788 grimages to various Bulgarian monasteries?" the peasants often answer: "We
484 go for the good of our souls." No mention is made of the enhanced social status that is theirs as a result of such a trip or the excitement of being sped on their way at the edge of the village by the priest and a flock of relatives or welcomed back far outside the village by the same relatives two or three days later. The most popular place to visit is Rila Monastery, the historic, magnificent establishment in the heart of the Rila Mountains to which thousands come at Easter time. The Dragalevtsy peasants (only thirty-five from the village went in 1934) mix with the assembled multitudes at Rila, attend the services, buy sacred objects, and snatch what sleep they can before starting on the return journey. If they are walking, the pilgrimage requires five or six days; if they go by automobile from Sofia, they spend one day en route each way. In olden days pilgrimages played a great part in creating social contacts between the villages and the outside world. Now we can safely conclude that as other means of making social contact increase, the importance of making pilgrimages decreases.

484 4. To Visit Socially. Once a year a Bulgarian village has an "At Home
574 Day." This event always falls on the name day of the saint, angel, or member of the Trinity for whom the local church is named and is commemorated by the preparation of immense quantities of stews for the few hundred guests from outside. Many of these guests are old residents returning with their families for a visit. There is a special service at which bread and boiled corn is blessed, the priest in return receiving a portion of the food. At the meal afterwards, to which all guests are invited, pledges are made for the upkeep of the local church. Many guests would rather go to the homes of friends and relatives than partake of the common meal; this makes more intimate visitation possible. These "At Homes" of neighboring villages are the chief attractions drawing the peasants from Dragalevtsy to other villages. Table 13 on the following page shows us how often Dragalevtsy family heads visit other villages (for the "At Home" as well as other purposes).

484 Combining the data in this table with other information obtained we can make the following conclusions regarding the social visits of Dragalevtsy people to other villages: